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Poems *by* Edna St. Vincent Millay

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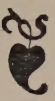
THE HARPWEAVER AND OTHER POEMS

"In the sublimation of lyricism she is unapproached. There is no one who so lifts extreme simplicity and naturalness on to the peaks of ecstasy or the heights of sorrow; or who so combines beauty with power." MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.

Poems *by*
Edna St. Vincent Millay



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SECTION ONE

Renascence

All I could see from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood ;
I turned and looked another way,
And saw three islands in a bay.
So with my eyes I traced the line
Of the horizon, thin and fine,
Straight around till I was come
Back to where I'd started from
And all I saw from where I stood
Was three long mountains and a wood.
Over these things I could not see :
These were the things that bounded
me ;
And I could touch them with my hand,
Almost, I thought, from where I stand.
And all at once things seemed so small
My breath came short, and scarce at all.
But, sure, the sky is big, I said ;
Miles and miles above my head ;
So here upon my back I'll lie
And look my fill into the sky.
And so I looked, and, after all,
The sky was not so very tall.
The sky, I said, must somewhere stop,
And—sure enough !—I see the top !

The sky, I thought, is not so grand ;
I 'most could touch it with my hand !
And reaching up my hand to try,
I screamed to feel it touch the sky.

I screamed, and—lo !—Infinity
Came down and settled over me ;
Forced back my scream into my chest,
Bent back my arm upon my breast,
And, pressing of the Undefined
The definition on my mind,
Held up before my eyes a glass
Through which my shrinking sight did pass
Until it seemed I must behold
Immensity made manifold ;
Whispered to me a word whose sound
Deafened the air for worlds around,
And brought unmuffled to my ears
The gossiping of friendly spheres,
The creaking of the tented sky,
The ticking of Eternity.
I saw and heard and knew at last
The How and Why of all things, past,
And present, and for evermore.
The Universe, cleft to the core,
Lay open to my probing sense
That, sick'ning, I would fain pluck thence

But could not,—nay ! But needs must suck
At the great wound, and could not pluck
My lips away till I had drawn
All venom out.—Ah, fearful pawn !
For my omniscience paid I toll
In infinite remorse of soul.
All sin was of my sinning, all
Atoning mine, and mine the gall
Of all regret. Mine was the weight
Of every brooded wrong, the hate
That stood behind each envious thrust,
Mine every greed, mine every lust.
And all the while for every grief,
Each suffering, I craved relief
With individual desire,—
Craved all in vain ! And felt fierce fire
About a thousand people crawl ;
Perished with each,—then mourned for
all !
A man was starving in Capri ;
He moved his eyes and looked at me ;
I felt his gaze, I heard his moan,
And knew his hunger as my own.
I saw at sea a great fog bank
Between two ships that struck and sank ;
A thousand screams the heavens smote ;
And every scream tore through my throat.

No hurt I did not feel, no death
That was not mine ; mine each last breath
That, crying, met an answering cry
From the compassion that was I.
All suffering mine, and mine its rod ;
Mine, pity like the pity of God.
Ah, awful weight ! Infinity
Pressed down upon the finite Me !
My anguished spirit, like a bird,
Beating against my lips I heard ;
Yet lay the weight so close about
There was no room for it without.
And so beneath the weight lay I
And suffered death, but could not die.

Long had I lain thus, craving death,
When quietly the earth beneath
Gave way, and inch by inch, so great
At last had grown the crushing weight,
Into the earth I sank till I
Full six feet under ground did lie,
And sank no more,—there is no weight
Can follow here, however great.
From off my breast I felt it roll,
And as it went my tortured soul
Burst forth and fled in such a gust
That all about me swirled the dust.

Deep in the earth I rested now ;
Cool is its hand upon the brow
And soft its breast beneath the head
Of one who is so gladly dead.
And all at once, and over all
The pitying rain began to fall ;
I lay and heard each pattering hoof
Upon my lowly, thatchèd roof,
And seemed to love the sound far more
Than ever I had done before.
For rain it hath a friendly sound
To one who's six feet under ground ;
And scarce the friendly voice or face :
A grave is such a quiet place.

The rain, I said, is kind to come
And speak to me in my new home.
I would I were alive again
To kiss the fingers of the rain,
To drink into my eyes the shine
Of every slanting silver line,
To catch the freshened, fragrant breeze
From drenched and dripping apple-trees.
For soon the shower will be done,
And then the broad face of the sun
Will laugh above the rain-soaked earth
Until the world with answering mirth

Shakes joyously, and each round drop
Rolls, twinkling, from its grass-blade top.
How can I bear it, buried here,
While overhead the sky grows clear
And blue again after the storm?
O, multi-coloured, multiform,
Beloved beauty over me,
That I shall never, never see
Again! Spring-silver, autumn-gold,
That I shall never more behold!
Sleeping your myriad magics through,
Close-sepulchred away from you!
O God, I cried, give me new birth,
And put me back upon the earth!
Upset each cloud's gigantic gourd
And let the heavy rain, down-poured
In one big torrent, set me free,
Washing my grave away from me!

I ceased; and through the breathless hush
That answered me, the far-off rush
Of herald wings came whispering
Like music down the vibrant string
Of my ascending prayer, and—crash!
Before the wild wind's whistling lash
The startled storm-clouds reared on high
And plunged in terror down the sky,

And the big rain in one black wave
Fell from the sky and struck my
grave.
I know not how such things can be ;
I only know there came to me
A fragrance such as never clings
To aught save happy living things ;
A sound as of some joyous elf
Singing sweet songs to please himself,
And, through and over everything,
A sense of glad awakening.
The grass, a-tiptoe at my ear,
Whispering to me I could hear ;
I felt the rain's cool finger-tips
Brushed tenderly across my lips,
Laid gently on my sealèd sight,
And all at once the heavy night
Fell from my eyes and I could see,—
A drenched and dripping apple-tree,
A last long line of silver rain,
A sky grown clear and blue again.
And as I looked a quickening gust
Of wind blew up to me and thrust
Into my face a miracle
Of orchard-breath, and with the smell,—
I know not how such things can be !—
I breathed my soul back into me.

Ah ! Up then from the ground sprang I
And hailed the earth with such a cry
As is not heard save from a man
Who has been dead, and lives again.
About the trees my arms I wound ;
Like one gone mad I hugged the ground ;
I raised my quivering arms on high ;
I laughed and laughed into the sky,
Till at my throat a strangling sob
Caught fiercely, and a great heart-throb
Sent instant tears into my eyes ;
O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity !
Thou canst not move across the grass
But my quick eyes will see Thee pass,
Nor speak, however silently,
But my hushed voice will answer Thee.
I know the path that tells Thy way
Through the cool eve of every day ;
God, I can push the grass apart
And lay my finger on Thy heart !

The world stands out on either side
No wider than the heart is wide ;
Above the world is stretched the sky,—
No higher than the soul is high.

The heart can push the sea and land
Farther away on either hand ;
The soul can split the sky in two,
And let the face of God shine through.
But East and West will pinch the heart
That cannot keep them pushed apart ;
And he whose soul is flat—the sky
Will cave in on him by and by.

God's World

O WORLD, I cannot hold thee close enough !
Thy winds, thy wide grey skies !
Thy mists, that roll and rise !
Thy woods, this autumn day, that ache and sag
And all but cry with colour ! That gaunt crag
To crush ! To lift the lean of that black bluff !
World, World, I cannot get thee close enough !

Long have I known a glory in it all,
But never knew I this ;
Here such a passion is
As stretcheth me apart,—Lord, I do fear
Thou'st made the world too beautiful this year ;
My soul is all but out of me,—let fall
No burning leaf ; prithee, let no bird call

Afternoon on a Hill

I WILL be the gladdest thing
Under the sun !
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds
With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show
Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
And then start down.

Journey

Ah, could I lay me down in this long grass
And close my eyes, and let the quiet wind
Blow over me,—I am so tired, so tired
Of passing pleasant places! All my life,
Following Care along the dusty road,
Have I looked back at loveliness and sighed;
Yet at my hand an unrelenting hand
Tugged ever, and I passed. All my life long
Over my shoulder have I looked at peace
And now I fain would lie in this long grass
And close my eyes.
Yet onward!
Cat-birds call
Through the long afternoon, and creeks at dusk
Are guttural. Whip-poor-wills wake and cry,
Drawing the twilight close about their throats.
Only my heart makes answer. Eager vines
Go up the rocks and wait; flushed apple-trees
Pause in their dance and break the ring for me;
Dim, shady wood-roads, redolent of fern
And bayberry, that through sweet bevies thread
Of round-faced roses, pink and petulant,
Look back and beckon ere they disappear.
Only my heart, only my heart responds.
Yet, ah, my path is sweet on either side

All through the dragging day,—sharp underfoot,
And hot, and like dead mist the dry dust hangs—
But far, oh, far as passionate eye can reach,
And long, ah, long as rapturous eye can cling,
The world is mine : blue hill, still silver lake,
Broad field, bright flower, and the long white road
A gateless garden, and an open path :
My feet to follow, and my heart to hold.

Sorrow

Sorrow like a ceaseless rain
  Beats upon my heart.
People twiſt and scream in pain,—
Dawn will find them ſtill again ;
This has neither wax nor wane,
  Neither ſtop nor ſtart.

People dress and go to town ;
  I sit in my chair.
All my thoughts are slow and brown :
Standing up or sitting down
Little matters, or what gown
  Or what shoes I wear.

Tavern

I'LL keep a little tavern
  Below the high hill's crest,
Wherein all grey-eyed people
  May sit them down and rest.

There shall be plates a-plenty,
  And mugs to melt the chill
Of all the grey-eyed people
  Who happen up the hill.

There sound will sleep the traveller,
  And dream his journey's end,
But I will rouse at midnight
  The falling fire to tend.

Aye, 'tis a curious fancy—
  But all the good I know
Was taught me out of two grey eyes
  A long time ago.

Ashes of Life

Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike ;
Eat I must, and sleep I will,—and would that night were here !
But ah !—to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike !
Would that it were day again !—with twilight near !

Love has gone and left me and I don't know what to do ;
This or that or what you will is all the same to me ;
But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through,—
There's little use in anything as far as I can see.

Love has gone and left me,—and the neighbours knock and borrow,
And life goes on forever like the gnawing of a mouse,—
And to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
There's this little street and this little house.

The Little Ghost

I KNEW her for a little ghost
That in my garden walked ;
The wall is high—higher than most—
And the green gate was locked.

And yet I did not think of that
Till after she was gone—
I knew her by the broad white hat,
All ruffled, she had on.

By the dear ruffles round her feet,
By her small hands that hung
In their lace mitts, austere and sweet,
Her gown's white folds among.

I watched to see if she would stay,
What she would do—and oh !
She looked as if she liked the way
I let my garden grow !

She bent above my favourite mint
With conscious garden grace,
She smiled and smiled—there was no hint
Of sadness in her face.

She held her gown on either side
To let her slippers show,
And up the walk she went with pride,
The way great ladies go.

And where the wall is built in new
And is of ivy bare
She paused—then opened and passed through
A gate that once was there.

Kin to Sorrow

Am I kin to Sorrow,
That so oft
Falls the knocker of my door—
Neither loud nor soft,
But as long accustomed,
Under Sorrow's hand?
Marigolds around the step
And rosemary stand,
And then comes Sorrow—
And what does Sorrow care
For the rosemary
Or the marigolds there?
Am I kin to Sorrow?
Are we kin?
That so oft upon my door—
Oh, come in!

Three Songs of Shattering

I

The first rose on my rose-tree
Budded, bloomed, and shattered,
During sad days when to me
Nothing mattered.

Grief of grief has drained me clean;
Still it seems a pity
No one saw,—it must have been
Very pretty.

II

Let the little birds sing;
Let the little lambs play;
Spring is here; and so 'tis spring;—
But not in the old way!

I recall a place
Where a plum-tree grew;
There you lifted up your face,
And blossoms covered you.

If the little birds sing,
And the little lambs play,
Spring is here ; and so 'tis spring—
But not in the old way !

III

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree !
Ere spring was going—ah ! spring is gone !
And there comes no summer to the like of you and me,—
Blossom time is early, but no fruit sets on.

All the dog-wood blossoms are underneath the tree,
Browned at the edges, turned in a day ;
And I would with all my heart they trimmed a mound for me,
And weeds were tall on all the paths that led that way !

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The Shroud

Death, I say, my heart is bowed
  Unto thine,—O mother !
This red gown will make a shroud
  Good as any other !

(I, that would not wait to wear
  My own bridal things,
In a dress dark as my hair
  Made my answerings.

I, to-night, that till he came
  Could not, could not wait,
In a gown as bright as flame
  Held for them the gate.)

Death, I say, my heart is bowed
  Unto thine,—O mother !
This red gown will make a shroud
  Good as any other !

The Dream

Love, if I weep it will not matter,
  And if you laugh I shall not care ;
Foolish am I to think about it,
  But it is good to feel you there.

Love, in my sleep I dreamed of waking,—
  White and awful the moonlight reached
Over the floor, and somewhere, somewhere,
  There was a shutter loose,—it screeched !

Swung in the wind,—and no wind blowing !—
  I was afraid, and turned to you,
Put out my hand to you for comfort,—
  And you were gone ! Cold, cold as dew,

Under my hand the moonlight lay !
  Love, if you laugh I shall not care,
But if I weep it will not matter,—
  Ah, it is good to feel you there !

Indifference

I SAID,—for Love was laggard, O, Love was slow
to come,—
" I'll hear his ſtep and know his ſtep when I am
warm in bed ;
But I'll never leave my pillow, though there be
some
As would let him in—and take him in with
tears ! " I said.
I lay,—for Love was laggard, O, he came not until
dawn,—
I lay and listened for his ſtep and could not get
to sleep ;
And he found me at my window with my big
cloak on,
All sorry with the tears some folks might weep !

Witch-Wife

She is neither pink nor pale,
And she never will be all mine ;
She learned her hands in a fairy-tale,
And her mouth on a valentine.

She has more hair than she needs ;
In the sun 'tis a woe to me !
And her voice is a string of coloured beads,
Or steps leading into the sea.

She loves me all that she can,
And her ways to my ways resign ;
But she was not made for any man,
And she never will be all mine.

Blight

HARD seeds of hate I planted
That should by now be grown,—
Rough ſtalks, and from thick ſtamens
A poisonous pollen blown,
And odours rank, unbreathable,
From dark corollas thrown !

At dawn from my damp garden
I shook the chilly dew ;
The thin boughs locked behind me
That sprang to let me through ;
The blossoms slept,—I sought a place
Where nothing lovely grew.

And there, when day was breaking,
I knelt and looked around :
The light was near, the silence
Was palpitant with sound ;
I drew my hate from out my breaſt
And thruſt it in the ground.

Oh, ye so fiercely tended,
Ye little seeds of hate !

I bent above your growing
  Early and noon and late,
Yet are ye drooped and pitiful,—
  I cannot rear ye straight !

The sun seeks out my garden,
  No nook is left in shade,
No mist nor mould nor mildew
  Endures on any blade,
Sweet rain slants under every bough :
  Ye falter, and ye fade.

When the Year Grows Old

I CANNOT but remember
  When the year grows old—
October—November—
  How she disliked the cold !

She used to watch the swallows
  Go down across the sky,
And turn from the window
  With a little sharp sigh.

And often when the brown leaves
  Were brittle on the ground,
And the wind in the chimney
  Made a melancholy sound,

She had a look about her
  That I wish I could forget—
The look of a scared thing
  Sitting in a net !

Oh, beautiful at nightfall
  The soft spitting snow !
And beautiful the bare boughs
  Rubbing to and fro !

But the roaring of the fire,
And the warmth of fur,
And the boiling of the kettle
Were beautiful to her !

I cannot but remember
When the year grows old—
October—November—
How she disliked the cold !

Sonnets

I

Thou art not lovelier than lilacs,—no,
Nor honeysuckle ; thou art not more fair
Than small white single poppies,—I can bear
Thy beauty ; though I bend before thee, though
From left to right, not knowing where to go,
I turn my troubled eyes, nor here nor there
Find any refuge from thee, yet I swear
So has it been with mist,—with moonlight so.
Like him who day by day unto his draught
Of delicate poison adds him one drop more
Till he may drink unharmed the death of ten,
Even so, inured to beauty, who have quaffed
Each hour more deeply than the hour before,
I drink—and live—what has destroyed some men.

II

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide!
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go,—so with his memory they brim!
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, "There is no memory of him here!"
And so stand stricken, so remembering him!

III

Mindful of you the sodden earth in spring
And all the flowers that in the springtime grow,
And dusty roads, and thistles, and the slow
Rising of the round moon, all throats that sing
The summer through, and each departing wing,
And all the nests that the bared branches show,
And all winds that in any weather blow,
And all the storms that the four seasons bring.
You go no more on your exultant feet
Up paths that only mist and morning knew,
Or watch the wind, or listen to the beat
Of a bird's wings too high in air to view,—
But you were something more than young and sweet
And fair,—and the long year remembers you.

IV

Not in this chamber only at my birth—
When the long hours of that mysterious night
Were over, and the morning was in sight—
I cried, but in strange places, steppe and firth
I have not seen, through alien grief and mirth ;
And never shall one room contain me quite
Who in so many rooms first saw the light,
Child of all mothers, native of the earth.
So is no warmth for me at any fire
To-day, when the world's fire has burned so low ;
I kneel, spending my breath in vain desire,
At that cold hearth which one time roared so strong,
And straighten back in weariness, and long
To gather up my little gods and go.

V

If I should learn, in some quite casual way,
That you were gone, not to return again—
Read from the back-page of a paper, say,
Held by a neighbour in a subway train,
How at the corner of this avenue
And such a street (so are the papers filled)
A hurrying man—who happened to be you—
At noon to-day had happened to be killed,
I should not cry aloud—I could not cry
Aloud, or wring my hands in such a place—
I should but watch the station lights rush by
With a more careful interest on my face,
Or raise my eyes and read with greater care
Where to store furs and how to treat the hair.

VI

Bluebeard

This door you might not open, and you did ;
So enter now, and see for what slight thing
You are betrayed. . . . Here is no treasure hid,
No cauldron, no clear crystal mirroring
The sought-for truth, no heads of women slain
For greed like yours, no writhings of distress,
But only what you see. . . . Look yet again—
An empty room, cobwebbed and comfortless.
Yet this alone out of my life I kept
Unto myself, lest any know me quite ;
And you did so profane me when you crept
Unto the threshold of this room to-night
That I must never more behold your face.
This now is yours. I seek another place.

SECTION TWO

I

My candle burns at both ends ;
It will not last the night ;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light !

II

Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses stand :
Come and see my shining palace built upon the sand !

Recuerdo

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
It was bare and bright, and smelled like a stable—
But we looked into a fire, we leaned across a table,
We lay on a hill-top underneath the moon;
And the whistles kept blowing, and the dawn came soon.

We were very tired, we were very merry—
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry;
And you ate an apple, and I ate a pear,
From a dozen of each we had bought somewhere;
And the sky went wan, and the wind came cold,
And the sun rose dripping, a bucketful of gold.

We were very tired, we were very merry,
We had gone back and forth all night on the ferry.
We hailed, "Good morrow, mother!" to a shawl-covered head,
And bought a morning paper, which neither of us read;
And she wept, "God bless you!" for the apples and pears,
And we gave her all our money but our subway fares.

Thursday

And if I loved you Wednesday,
  Well, what is that to you?
I do not love you Thursday—
  So much is true.

And why you come complaining
  Is more than I can see.
I loved you Wednesday,—yes—but what
  Is that to me?

To the Not Impossible Him

How shall I know, unless I go
To Cairo and Cathay,
Whether or not this blessed spot
Is blest in every way?

Now it may be, the flower for me
Is this beneath my nose;
How shall I tell, unless I smell
The Carthaginian rose?

The fabric of my faithful love
No power shall dim or ravel
Whilst I stay here,—but oh, my dear,
If I should ever travel!

The Singing-Woman from the Wood's Edge

WHAT should I be but a prophet and a liar,
Whose mother was a leprechaun, whose father was
a friar ?
Teethed on a crucifix and cradled under water,
What should I be but the fiend's god-daughter ?

And who should be my playmates but the adder and
the frog,
That was got beneath a furze-bush and born in a
bog ?
And what should be my singing, that was christened
at an altar,
But Aves and Credos and Psalms out of the Psalter ?

You will see such webs on the wet grass, maybe,
As a pixie-mother weaves for her baby,
You will find such flame at the wave's weedy ebb
As flashes in the meshes of a mer-mother's web,

But there comes to birth no common spawn
From the love of a priest for a leprechaun,
And you never have seen and you never will see
Such things as the things that swaddled me !

After all's said and after all's done,
What should I be but a harlot and a nun?

In through the bushes, on any foggy day,
My dad would come a-swishing of the drops away,
With a prayer for my death and a groan for my birth,
A-mumbling of his beads for all that he was worth.

And there'd sit my ma, with her knees beneath her chin,
A-looking in his face and a-drinking of it in,
And a-marking in the moss some funny little saying
That would mean just the opposite of all that he was praying!

He taught me the holy-talk of Vesper and of Matin,
He heard me my Greek and he heard me my Latin,
He blessed me and crossed me to keep my soul from evil,
And we watched him out of sight, and we conjured up the devil!

Oh, the things I haven't seen and the things I haven't known,
What with hedges and ditches till after I was grown,

And yanked both ways by my mother and my
father,
With a "Which would you better?" and a
"Which would you rather?"

With him for a sire and her for a dam,
What should I be but just what I am?

Humoresque

"HEAVEN bless the babe!" they said;
"What queer books she must have read!"
(Love, by whom I was beguiled,
Grant I may not bear a child.)

"Little does she guess to-day
What the world may be," they say.
(Snow, drift deep and cover
Till the spring my murdered lover.)

She is Overheard Singing

Oh, Prue she has a patient man,
And Joan a gentle lover,
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,—
But my true love's a rover !

Mig, her man's as good as cheese
And honest as a briar,
Sue tells her love what he's thinking of,—
But my dear lad's a liar !

Oh, Sue and Prue and Agatha
Are thick with Mig and Joan !
They bite their threads and shake their heads
And gnaw my name like a bone ;

And Prue says, " Mine's a patient man,
As never snaps me up,"
And Agatha, " Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,
Could live content in a cup ; "

Sue's man's mind is like good jell—
All one colour, and clear—
And Mig's no call to think at all
What's to come next year,

While Joan makes boaſt of a gentle lad,
That's troubled with that and this ;—
But they all would give the life they live
For a look from the man I kiss !

Cold he slants his eyes about,
And few enough's his choice,—
Though he'd slip me clean for a nun, or a queen,
Or a beggar with knots in her voice,—

And Agatha will turn awake
When her good man sleeps sound,
And Mig and Sue and Joan and Prue
Will hear the clock ſtrike round ;

For Prue she has a patient man,
As asks not when or why,
And Mig and Sue have naught to do
But peep who's passing by,

Joan is paired with a putterer
That baſtes and taſtes and salts,
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth,—
But my true love is false !

The Unexplorer

THERE was a road ran past our house
Too lovely to explore.
I asked my mother once—she said
That if you followed where it led
It brought you to the milk-man's door.
(That's why I have not travelled more.)

Grown-Up

Was it for this I uttered prayers,
And sobbed and cursed and kicked the stairs,
That now, domestic as a plate,
I should retire at half-past eight?

The Penitent

I HAD a little Sorrow,
Born of a little Sin,
I found a room all damp with gloom
And shut us all within ;
And, " Little Sorrow, weep," said I,
" And, Little Sin, pray God to die,
And I upon the floor will lie
And think how bad I've been ! "

Alas for pious planning—
It mattered not a whit !
As far as gloom went in that room,
The lamp might have been lit !
My Little Sorrow would not weep,
My Little Sin would go to sleep—
To save my soul I could not keep
My graceless mind on it !

So up I got in anger,
And took a book I had,
And put a ribbon on my hair
To please a passing lad.
And, " One thing there's no getting by—
I've been a wicked girl," said I ;
" But if I can't be sorry, why,
I might as well be glad ! "

Daphne

WHY do you follow me ?—
Any moment I can be
Nothing but a laurel-tree.

Any moment of the chase
I can leave you in my place
A pink bough for your embrace.

Yet if over hill and hollow,
Still it is your will to follow,
I am off ;—to heel, Apollo !

Portrait by a Neighbour

BEFORE she has her floor swept
Or her dishes done,
Any day you'll find her
A-sunning in the sun !

It's long after midnight
Her key's in the lock,
And you never see her chimney smoke
Till past ten o'clock !

She digs in her garden
With a shovel and a spoon,
She weeds her lazy lettuce
By the light of the moon.

She walks up the walk
Like a woman in a dream,
She forgets she borrowed butter
And pays you back cream !

Her lawn looks like a meadow,
And if she mows the place
She leaves the clover standing
And the Queen Anne's lace !

The Merry Maid

Oh, I am grown so free from care
  Since my heart broke !
I set my throat against the air,
  I laugh at simple folk !

There's little kind and little fair
  Is worth its weight in smoke
To me, that's grown so free from care
  Since my heart broke !

Lass, if to sleep you would repair
  As peaceful as you woke,
Best not besiege your lover there
  For just the words he spoke
To me, that's grown so free from care
  Since my heart broke !

To S. M.

If he should lie a-dying

I am not willing you should go
Into the earth, where Helen went;
She is awake by now, I know.
Where Cleopatra's anklets rust
You will not lie with my consent;
And Sappho is a roving dust;
Cressid could love again; Dido,
Rotted in state, is restless still;
You leave me much against my will.

The Philosopher

And what are you that, wanting you,
I should be kept awake
As many nights as there are days
With weeping for your sake?

And what are you that, missing you,
As many days as crawl
I should be listening to the wind
And looking at the wall?

I know a man that's a braver man
And twenty men as kind,
And what are you, that you should be
The one man in my mind?

Yet women's ways are witless ways,
As any sage will tell,—
And what am I, that I should love
So wisely and so well?

Four Sonnets

I

Love, though for this you riddle me with darts,
And drag me at your chariot till I die,—
Oh, heavy prince ! Oh, panderer of hearts !—
Yet hear me tell how in their throats they lie
Who shout you mighty : thick about my hair,
Day in, day out, your ominous arrows purr,
Who still am free, unto no querulous care
A fool, and in no temple worshipper!
I, that have bared me to your quiver's fire,
Lifted my face into its puny rain,
Do wreathe you Impotent to Evoke Desire
As you are Powerless to Elicit Pain !
(Now will the god, for blasphemy so brave,
Punish me, surely, with the shaft I crave !)

II

I THINK I should have loved you presently,
And given in earnest words I flung in jest;
And lifted honest eyes for you to see,
And caught your hand against my cheek and breast;
And all my pretty follies flung aside
That won you to me, and beneath your gaze,
Naked of reticence and shorn of pride,
Spread like a chart my little wicked ways.
I, that had been to you, had you remained,
But one more waking from a recurrent dream,
Cherish no less the certain stakes I gained,
And walk your memory's halls, austere, supreme,
A ghost in marble of a girl you knew
Who would have loved you in a day or two.

III

Oh, think not I am faithful to a vow !
Faithless am I save to love's self alone.
Were you not lovely I would leave you now :
After the feet of beauty fly my own.
Were you not ſtill my hunger's rareſt food,
And water ever to my wildeſt thirſt,
I would desert you—think not but I would !—
And seek another as I sought you firſt.
But you are mobile as the veering air,
And all your charms more changeful than the tide,
Wherefore to be inconſtant is no care :
I have but to continue at your side.
So wanton, light and false, my love, are you,
I am moſt faithless when I moſt am true.

IV

I SHALL forget you presently, my dear,
So make the most of this, your little day,
Your little month, your little half a year,
Ere I forget, or die, or move away,
And we are done forever ; by and by
I shall forget you, as I said, but now,
If you entreat me with your loveliest lie
I will protest you with my favourite vow.
I would indeed that love were longer-lived,
And oaths were not so brittle as they are,
But so it is, and nature has contrived
To struggle on without a break thus far,—
Whether or not we find what we are seeking
Is idle, biologically speaking.

SECTION THREE

Spring

To what purpose, April, do you return again ?
Beauty is not enough.
You can no longer quiet me with the redness
Of little leaves opening ſtickily.
I know what I know.
The sun is hot on my neck as I observe
The spikes of the crocus.
The smell of the earth is good.
It is apparent that there is no death.
But what does that signify ?
Not only under ground are the brains of men
Eaten by maggots.
Life in itself
Is nothing,
An empty cup, a flight of uncarpeted ſtairs.
It is not enough that yearly, down this hill,
April
Comes like an idiot, babbling and ſtrewing flowers.

City Trees

The trees along this city street,
Save for the traffic and the trains,
Would make a sound as thin and sweet
As trees in country lanes.

And people standing in their shade
Out of a shower, undoubtedly
Would hear such music as is made
Upon a country tree.

Oh, little leaves that are so dumb
Against the shrieking city air,
I watch you when the wind has come—
I know what sound is there.

The Blue-Flag in the Bog

God had called us, and we came ;
  Our loved Earth to ashes left ;
Heaven was a neighbour's house,
  Open flung to us, bereft.

Gay the lights of Heaven showed,
  And 'twas God Who walked ahead ;
Yet I wept along the road,
  Wanting my own house instead.

Wept unseen, unheeded cried,
  " All you things my eyes have kissed,
Fare you well ! We meet no more,
  Lovely, lovely tattered mist !

Weary wings that rise and fall
  All day long above the fire ! "—
Red with heat was every wall,
  Rough with heat was every wire—

" Fare you well, you little winds
  That the flying embers chase !
Fare you well, you shuddering day,
  With your hands before your face !

And, ah, blackened by strange blight,
Or to a false sun unfurled,
Now for evermore good-bye,
All the gardens in the world !

On the windless hills of Heaven,
That I have no wish to see,
White, eternal lilies stand,
By a lake of ebony.

But the Earth forevermore
Is a place where nothing grows,—
Dawn will come, and no bud break ;
Evening, and no blossom close.

Spring will come, and wander slow
Over an indifferent land,
Stand beside an empty creek,
Hold a dead seed in her hand."

God had called us, and we came,
But the blessed road I trod
Was a bitter road to me,
And at heart I questioned God.

" Though in Heaven," I said, " be all
That the heart would most desire,
Held Earth naught save souls of sinners
Worth the saving from a fire ?

Withered grass,—the wasted growing !
Aimless ache of laden boughs ! "
Little things God had forgotten
Called me, from my burning house.

" Though in Heaven," I said, " be all
That the eye could ask to see,
All the things I ever knew
Are this blaze in back of me."

" Though in Heaven," I said, " be all
That the ear could think to lack,
All the things I ever knew
Are this roaring at my back."

It was God Who walked ahead,
Like a shepherd to the fold ;
In His footsteps fared the weak,
And the weary and the old,

Glad enough of gladness over,
Ready for the peace to be,—
But a thing God had forgotten
Was the growing bones of me.

And I drew a bit apart,
And I lagged a bit behind,
And I thought on Peace Eternal,
Lest He look into my mind ;

And I gazed upon the sky,
And I thought of Heavenly Rest,—
And I slipped away like water
Through the fingers of the blest !

All their eyes were fixed on Glory,
Not a glance brushed over me ;
" Alleluia ! Alleluia ! "
Up the road,—and I was free.

And my heart rose like a freshet,
And it swept me on before,
Giddy as a whirling stick,
Till I felt the earth once more.

All the Earth was charred and black,
  Fire had swept from pole to pole ;
And the bottom of the sea
  Was as brittle as a bowl ;

And the timbered mountain-top
  Was as naked as a skull,—
Nothing left, nothing left,
  Of the Earth so beautiful !

" Earth," I said, " how can I leave you ? "
  " You are all I have," I said ;
" What is left to take my mind up,
  Living always, and you dead ? "

" Speak ! " I said, " Oh, tell me something !
  Make a sign that I can see !
For a keepsake ! To keep always !
  Quick !—before God misses me ! "

And I listened for a voice ;—
  But my heart was all I heard ;
Not a screech-owl, not a loon,
  Not a tree-toad said a word.

And I waited for a sign ;—
Coals and cinders, nothing more ;
And a little cloud of smoke
Floating on a valley floor.

And I peered into the smoke
Till it rotted, like a fog :—
There, encompassed round by fire,
Stood a blue-flag in a bog !

Little flames came wading out,
Straining, straining towards its stem,
But it was so blue and tall
That it scorned to think of them !

Red and thirsty were their tongues,
As the tongues of wolves must be,
But it was so blue and tall—
Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see !

All my heart became a tear,
All my soul became a tower,
Never loved I anything
As I loved that tall blue flower !

It was all the little boats
  That had ever sailed the sea,
It was all the little books
  That had gone to school with me ;

On its roots like iron claws
  Rearing up so blue and tall,—
It was all the gallant Earth
  With its back againſt a wall !

In a breath, ere I had breathed,—
  Oh, I laughed, I cried, to see !—
I was kneeling at its side,
  And it leaned its head on me !

Crumbling ſtones and sliding sand
  Is the road to Heaven now ;
Icy at my ſtraining knees
  Drags the awful under-tow ;

Soon but ſtepping-ſtones of duſt
  Will the road to Heaven be,—
Father, Son and Holy Ghoſt,
  Reach a hand and rescue me !

" There—there, my blue-flag flower ;
Hush—hush—go to sleep ;
That is only God you hear,
Counting up His folded sheep !

Lullabye—lullabye—
That is only God that calls,
Missing me, seeking me,
Ere the road to nothing falls !

He will set His mighty feet
Firmly on the sliding sand ;
Like a little frightened bird
I will creep into His hand ;

I will tell Him all my grief,
I will tell Him all my sin ;
He will give me half His robe
For a cloak to wrap you in.

Lullabye—lullabye—"
Rocks the burnt-out planet free !—
Father, Son and Holy Ghost,
Reach a hand and rescue me !

Ah, the voice of love at last !
  Lo, at last the face of light !
And the whole of His white robe
  For a cloak against the night !

And upon my heart asleep
  All the things I ever knew !—
" Holds Heaven not some cranny, Lord,
  For a flower so tall and blue ? "

All's well and all's well !
  Gay the lights of Heaven show !
In some moist and Heavenly place
  We will set it out to grow.

Eel-Grass

No matter what I say,
All that I really love
Is the rain that flattens on the bay,
And the eel-grass in the cove ;
The jingle-shells that lie and bleach
At the tide-line, and the trace
Of higher tides along the beach :
Nothing in this place.

Elegy before Death

THERE will be rose and rhododendron
When you are dead and under ground ;
Still will be heard from white syringas
Heavy with bees, a sunny sound ;

Still will the tamaracks be raining
After the rain has ceased, and ſtill
Will there be robins in the ſtubble,
Brown sheep upon the warm green hill.

Spring will not ail nor autumn falter ;
Nothing will know that you are gone,
Saving alone some sullen plough-land
None but yourself sets foot upon ;

Saving the may-weed and the pig-weed
Nothing will know that you are dead,—
These, and perhaps a useless wagon
Standing beside some tumbled shed.

Oh, there will pass with your great passing
Little of beauty not your own,—
Only the light from common water
Only the grace from simple ſtone !

The Bean-Stalk

Ho, Giant ! This is I !
I have built me a bean-stalk into your sky !
La,—but it's lovely, up so high !

This is how I came,—I put
There my knee, here my foot,
Up and up, from shoot to shoot—
And the blessed bean-stalk thinning
Like the mischief all the time,
Till it took me rocking, spinning,
In a dizzy, sunny circle,
Making angles with the root,
Far and out above the cackle
Of the city I was born in,
Till the little dirty city
In the light so sheer and sunny
Shone as dazzling bright and pretty
As the money that you find
In a dream of finding money—
What a wind ! What a morning !—

Till the tiny, shiny city,
When I shot a glance below,
Shaken with a giddy laughter,
Sick and blissfully afraid,

Was a dew-drop on a blade,
And a pair of moments after
Was the whirling guess I made,—
And the wind was like a whip
Cracking past my icy ears,
And my hair stood out behind,
And my eyes were full of tears,
Wide-open and cold,
More tears than they could hold,
The wind was blowing so,
And my teeth were in a row,
Dry and grinning,
And I felt my foot slip,
And I scratched the wind and whined,
And I clutched the stalk and jabbered,
With my eyes shut blind,—
What a wind ! What a wind !

Your broad sky, Giant,
Is the shelf of a cupboard ;
I make bean-stalks, I'm
A builder, like yourself,
But bean-stalks is my trade,
I couldn't make a shelf,
Don't know how they're made,
Now, a bean-stalk is more pliant—
La, what a climb !

Weeds

White with daisies and red with sorrel
And empty, empty under the sky !—
Life is a queſt and love a quarrel—
Here is a place for me to lie.

Daisies spring from damnèd seeds,
And this red fire that here I see
Is a worthless crop of crimson weeds,
Cursed by farmers thriftily.

But here, unhated for an hour,
The sorrel runs in ragged flame,
The daisy ſtands, a baſtard flower,
Like flowers that bear an honeſt name.

And here a while, where no wind brings
The baying of a pack athirſt,
May sleep the sleep of blessed things
The blood too bright, the brow accurſt.

Passer Mortuus Est

Death devours all lovely things;
Lesbia with her sparrow
Shares the darkness,—presently
Every bed is narrow.

Unremembered as old rain
Dries the sheer libation,
And the little petulant hand
Is an annotation.

After all, my erstwhile dear,
My no longer cherished,
Need we say it was not love,
Now that love is perished?

Pastoral

If it were only still !—
With far away the shrill
Crying of a cock ;
Or the shaken bell
From a cow's throat
Moving through the bushes ;
Or the soft shock
Of wizened apples falling
From an old tree
In a forgotten orchard
Upon the hilly rock !

Oh, grey hill,
Where the grazing herd
Licks the purple blossom,
Crops the spiky weed !
Oh, stony pasture,
Where the tall mullein
Stands up so sturdy
On its little seed !

Assault

I

I HAD forgotten how the frogs must sound
After a year of silence, else I think
I should not so have ventured forth alone
At dusk upon this unfrequented road.

II

I am waylaid by Beauty. Who will walk
Between me and the crying of the frogs?
Oh, savage Beauty, suffer me to pass,
That am a timid woman, on her way
From one house to another!

Travel

The railroad track is miles away,
And the day is loud with voices speaking,
Yet there isn't a train goes by all day
But I hear its whistle shrieking.

All night there isn't a train goes by,
Though the night is still for sleep and dreaming,
But I see its cinders red on the sky,
And hear its engine steaming.

My heart is warm with the friends I make,
And better friends I'll not be knowing,
Yet there isn't a train I wouldn't take,
No matter where it's going.

Low-Tide

THESE wet rocks where the tide has been,
Barnacled white and weeded brown
And slimed beneath to a beautiful green,
These wet rocks where the tide went down
Will show again when the tide is high
Faint and perilous, far from shore,
No place to dream, but a place to die,—
The bottom of the sea once more.
There was a child that wandered through
A giant's empty house all day,—
House full of wonderful things and new,
But no fit place for a child to play.

Song of a Second April

April this year, not otherwise
Than April of a year ago,
Is full of whispers, full of sighs,
Of dazzling mud and dingy snow;
Hepaticas that pleased you so
Are here again, and butterflies.

There rings a hammering all day,
And shingles lie about the doors;
In orchards near and far away
The grey woodpecker taps and bores;
And men are merry at their chores,
And children earnest at their play.

The larger streams run still and deep,
Noisy and swift the small brooks run
Among the mullein stalks the sheep
Go up the hillside in the sun,
Pensively,—only you are gone,
You that alone I cared to keep.

Down, you mongrel, Death !
Back into your kennel !
I have stolen breath
In a stalk of fennel !
You shall scratch and you shall whine
Many a night, and you shall worry
Many a bone, before you bury
One sweet bone of mine !

When shall I be dead ?
When my flesh is withered,
And above my head
Yellow pollen gathered
All the empty afternoon ?
When sweet lovers pause and wonder
Who am I that lie thereunder,
Hidden from the moon ?

This my personal death ?—
That my lungs be failing
To inhale the breath
Others are exhaling ?
This my subtle spirit's end ?—
Ah, when the thawed winter splashes
Over these chance dust and ashes,
Weep not me, my friend !

Me, by no means dead
In that hour, but surely
When this book, unread,
Rots to earth obscurely,
And no more to any breaſt,
Close againſt the clamorous swelling
Of the thing there is no telling,
Are these pages pressed !

When this book is mould,
And a book of many
Waiting to be sold
For a casual penny,
In a little open case,
In a ſtreet unclean and cluttered,
Where a heavy mud is spattered
From the passing drays,

Stranger, pause and look ;
From the duſt of ages
Lift this little book,
Turn the tattered pages,
Read me, do not let me die !
Search the fading letters, finding
Steadfaſt in the broken binding
All that once was I!

When these veins are weeds,
  When these hollowed sockets
Watch the rooty seeds
  Bursting down like rockets,
And surmise the spring again,
  Or, remote in that black cupboard,
  Watch the pink worms writhing upward
At the smell of rain,

Boys and girls that lie
  Whispering in the hedges,
Do not let me die,
  Mix me with your pledges ;
Boys and girls that slowly walk
  In the woods, and weep, and quarrel,
  Staring past the pink wild laurel,
Mix me with your talk,

Do not let me die !
  Farmers at your raking,
When the sun is high,
  While the hay is making,
When, along the stubble strewn,
  Withering on their stalks uneaten,
  Strawberries turn dark and sweeten
In the lapse of noon ;

Shepherds on the hills,
In the paſtures, drowsing
To the tinkling bells
Of the brown sheep browsing ;
Sailors crying through the ſtorm ;
Scholars at your ſtudy ; hunters
Loſt amid the whirling winter's
Whiteness uniform ;

Men that long for sleep ;
Men that wake and revel ;—
If an old song leap
To your senses' level
At such moments, may it be
Sometimes, though a moment only,
Some forgotten, quaint and homely
Vehicle of me !

Women at your toil,
Women at your leisure
Till the kettle boil,
Snatch of me your pleasure,
Where the broom-ſtraw marks the leaf ;
Women quiet with your weeping
Leſt you wake a workman sleeping,
Mix me with your grief !

Boys and girls that steal
  From the shocking laughter
Of the old, to kneel
  By a dripping rafter
Under the discoloured eaves,
  Out of trunks with hingeless covers
  Lifting tales of saints and lovers,
Travellers, goblins, thieves,

Suns that shine by night,
  Mountains made from valleys,—
Bear me to the light,
  Flat upon your bellies
By the webby window lie,
  Where the little flies are crawling,—
  Read me, margin me with scrawling,
Do not let me die !

Sexton, ply your trade !
  In a shower of gravel
Stamp upon your spade !
  Many a rose shall ravel,
Many a metal wreath shall rust
  In the rain, and I go singing
  Through the lots where you are flinging
Yellow clay on dust !

Alms

My heart is what it was before,
A house where people come and go ;
But it is winter with your love,
The sashes are beset with snow.

I light the lamp and lay the cloth,
I blow the coals to blaze again ;
But it is winter with your love,
The frost is thick upon the pane.

I know a winter when it comes :
The leaves are listless on the boughs ;
I watched your love a little while,
And brought my plants into the house.

I water them and turn them south,
I snap the dead brown from the stem ;
But it is winter with your love,—
I only tend and water them.

There was a time I stood and watched
The small, ill-natured sparrows' fray ;
I loved the beggar that I fed,
I cared for what he had to say,

I stood and watched him out of sight ;
To-day I reach around the door
And set a bowl upon the step ;
My heart is what it was before,

But it is winter with your love ;
I scatter crumbs upon the sill,
And close the window,—and the birds
May take or leave them, as they will.

Inland

People that build their houses inland,
  People that buy a plot of ground
Shaped like a house, and build a house there,
  Far from the sea-board, far from the sound

Of water sucking the hollow ledges,
  Tons of water striking the shore,—
What do they long for, as I long for
  One salt smell of the sea once more?

People the waves have not awakened,
  Spanking the boats at the harbour's head,
What do they long for, as I long for,—
  Starting up in my inland bed,

Beating the narrow walls, and finding
  Neither a window nor a door,
Screaming to God for death by drowning,—
  One salt taste of the sea once more?

To a Poet that Died Young

Minstrel, what have you to do
With this man that, after you,
Sharing not your happy fate,
Sat as England's Laureate?
Vainly, in these iron days,
Strives the poet in your praise,
Minstrel, by whose singing side
Beauty walked, until you died.

Still, though none should hark again,
Drones the blue-fly in the pane,
Thickly crusts the blackest moss,
Blows the rose its musk across,
Floats the boat that is forgot
None the less to Camelot.

Many a bard's untimely death
Lends unto his verses breath;
Here's a song was never sung:
Growing old is dying young.
Minstrel, what is this to you:
That a man you never knew,
When your grave was far and green,
Sat and gossipped with a queen?

Thalia knows how rare a thing
Is it, to grow old and sing ;
When the brown and tepid tide
Closes in on every side.
Who shall say if Shelley's gold
Had withstood it to grow old ?

Wraith

"Thin Rain, whom are you haunting,
That you haunt my door?"
—Surely it is not I she's wanting;
Someone living here before—
"Nobody's in the house but me:
You may come in if you like and see."

Thin as thread, with exquisite fingers,—
Have you seen her, any of you?—
Grey shawl, and leaning on the wind,
And the garden showing through?

Glimmering eyes,—and silent, mostly,
Sort of a whisper, sort of a purr,
Asking something, asking it over,
If you get a sound from her.—

Ever see her, any of you?—
Strangest thing I've ever known,—
Every night since I moved in,
And I came to be alone.

"Thin Rain, hush with your knocking!
You may not come in!
This is I that you hear rocking;
Nobody's with me, nor has been!"

Curious, how she tried the window,—
Odd, the way she tries the door,—
Wonder just what sort of people
Could have had this house before . . .

Ebb

I KNOW what my heart is like
  Since your love died :
It is like a hollow ledge
Holding a little pool
  Left there by the tide,
  A little tepid pool,
Drying inward from the edge.

Elaine

Oh, come again to Aſtolat !
I will not ask you to be kind.
And you may go when you will go,
And I will ſtay behind.

I will not say how dear you are,
Or ask you if you hold me dear,
Or trouble you with things for you
The way I did laſt year.

So ſtill the orchard, Lancelot,
So very ſtill the lake shall be,
You could not guess—though you should guess—
What is become of me.

So wide shall be the garden-walk,
The garden-seat so very wide,
You needs muſt think—if you should think—
The lily maid had died.

Save that, a little way away,
I'd watch you for a little while,
To see you speak, the way you speak,
And smile,—if you should smile.

Burial

Mine is a body that should die at sea !
And have for a grave, instead of a grave
Six feet deep and the length of me,
All the water that is under the wave !

And terrible fishes to seize my flesh,
Such as a living man might fear,
And eat me while I am firm and fresh,—
Not wait till I've been dead for a year

Mariposa

Butterflies are white and blue
In this field we wander through.
Suffer me to take your hand.
Death comes in a day or two.

All the things we ever knew
Will be ashes in that hour.
Mark the transient butterfly,
How he hangs upon the flower.

Suffer me to take your hand.
Suffer me to cherish you
Till the dawn is in the sky.
Whether I be false or true,
Death comes in a day or two.

Doubt no more that Oberon

Doubt no more that Oberon—
Never doubt that Pan
Lived, and played a reed, and ran
After nymphs in a dark forest
In the merry, credulous days,—
Lived, and led a fairy band
Over the indulgent land!
Ah, for in this dourest, sorest
Age man's eye has looked upon,
Death to fauns and death to fays,
Still the dog-wood dares to raise—
Healthy tree, with trunk and root—
Ivory bowls that bear no fruit,
And the starlings and the jays—
Birds that cannot even sing—
Dare to come again in spring!

Lament

Listen, children :
Your father is dead.
From his old coats
I'll make you little jackets ;
I'll make you little trousers
From his old pants.
There'll be in his pockets
Things he used to put there,
Keys and pennies
Covered with tobacco ;
Dan shall have the pennies
To save in his bank ;
Anne shall have the keys
To make a pretty noise with.
Life must go on,
And the dead be forgotten ;
Life must go on,
Though good men die ;
Anne, eat your breakfast ;
Dan, take your medicine ;
Life must go on ;
I forget just why.

Exiled

Searching my heart for its true sorrow,
This is the thing I find to be :
That I am weary of words and people,
Sick of the city, wanting the sea ;

Wanting the ſticky, salty sweetness
Of the ſtrong wind and shattered spray ;
Wanting the loud sound and the soft sound
Of the big surf that breaks all day.

Always before about my dooryard,
Marking the reach of the winter sea,
Rooted in sand and dragging drift-wood,
Straggled the purple wild sweet-pea ;

Always I climbed the wave at morning,
Shook the sand from my shoes at night,
That now am caught beneath great buildings
Stricken with noise, confused with light.

If I could hear the green piles groaning
Under the windy wooden piers,
See once again the bobbing barrels,
And the black ſticks that fence the weirs,

If I could see the weedy mussels
  Cruſting the wrecked and rotting hulls,
Hear once again the hungry crying
  Overhead, of the wheeling gulls,

Feel once again the shanty ſtraining
  Under the turning of the tide,
Fear once again the rising freshet,
  Dread the bell in the fog outside,—

I should be happy,—that was happy
  All day long on the coaſt of Maine !
I have a need to hold and handle
  Shells and anchors and ships again !

I should be happy, that am happy
  Never at all since I came here.
I am too long away from water.
  I have a need of water near.

The Death of Autumn

When reeds are dead and a ſtraw to thatch the marshes,
And feathered pampas-grass rides into the wind
Like agèd warriors weſtward, tragic, thinned
Of half their tribe, and over the flattened rushes,
Stripped of its secret, open, ſtark and bleak,
Blackens afar the half-forgotten creek,—
Then leans on me the weight of the year, and crushes
My heart. I know that Beauty muſt ail and die,
And will be born again,—but ah, to see
Beauty ſtiffened, ſtaring up at the sky!
Oh, Autumn! Autumn!—What is the Spring to me?

Ode to Silence

Aye, but she ?
Your other sister and my other soul,
Grave Silence, lovelier
Than the three loveliest maidens, what of her ?
Clio, not you,
Not you, Calliope,
Nor all your wanton line,
Not Beauty's perfect self shall comfort me
For Silence once departed,
For her the cool-tongued, her the tranquil-hearted,
Whom evermore I follow wistfully,
Wandering Heaven and Earth and Hell and the four seasons through ;
Thalia, not you,
Not you, Melpomene,
Not your incomparable feet, O thin Terpsichore,
I seek in this great hall,
But one more pale, more pensive, most beloved of you all.

I seek her from afar.
I come from temples where her altars are,
From groves that bear her name,
Noisy with stricken victims now and sacrificial flame,
And cymbals struck on high and strident faces

Obſtreperous in her praise
They neither love nor know,
A goddess of gone days,
Departed long ago,
Abandoning the invaded shrines and fanes
Of her old sanctuary,
A deity obscure and legendary,
Of whom there now remains,
For sages to decipher and prieſts to garble,
Only and for a little while her letters wedged in
marble,
Which even now, behold, the friendly mumbling
rain erases,
And the inarticulate snow,
Leaving at laſt of her leaſt signs and traces
None whatsoever, nor whither she is vanished from
these places.

" She will love well," I said,
" If love be of that heart inhabiter,
The flowers of the dead ;
The red anemone that with no sound
Moves in the wind, and from another wound
That sprang, the heavily-sweet blue hyacinth,
That blossoms underground,
And sallow poppies, will be dear to her.
And will not Silence know

In the black shade of what obsidian steep
Stiffens the white narcissus numb with sleep ?
(Seed which Demeter's daughter bore from home,
Uptorn by desperate fingers long ago,
Reluctant even as she,
Undone Persephone,
And even as she set out again to grow
In twilight, in perdition's lean and inauspicious
loam).
She will love well," I said,
" The flowers of the dead ;
Where dark Persephone the winter round,
Uncomforted for home, uncomforted,
Lacking a sunny southern slope in northern Sicily,
With sullen pupils focussed on a dream,
Stares on the stagnant stream
That moats the unequivocable battlements of Hell,
There, there will she be found,
She that is Beauty veiled from men and Music in a
swound."

" I long for Silence as they long for breath
Whose helpless nostrils drink the bitter sea ;
What thing can be
So stout, what so redoubtable, in Death
What fury, what considerable rage, if only she,

Upon whose icy breast,
Unquestioned, uncaressed,
One time I lay,
And whom always I lack,
Even to this day,
Being by no means from that frigid bosom weaned
away,
If only she therewith be given me back ? "

I sought her down that dolorous labyrinth,
Wherein no shaft of sunlight ever fell,
And in among the bloodless everywhere
I sought her, but the air,
Breathed many times and spent,
Was fretful with a whispering discontent,
And questioning me, importuning me to tell
Some slightest tidings of the light of day they know
no more,
Plucking my sleeve, the eager shades were with me
where I went.
I paused at every grievous door,
And harked a moment, holding up my hand,—
and for a space
A hush was on them, while they watched my face ;
And then they fell a-whispering as before ;
So that I smiled at them and left them, seeing she
was not there.

I sought her, too,
Among the upper gods, although I knew
She was not like to be where feasting is,
Nor near to Heaven's lord,
Being a thing abhorred
And shunned of him, although a child of his,
(Not yours, not yours ; to you she owes not breath,
Mother of Song, being sown of Zeus upon a dream
of Death).
Fearing to pass unvisited some place
And later learn, too late, how all the while,
With her still face,
She had been standing there and seen me pass, without a smile,
I sought her even to the sagging board whereat
The stout immortals sat ;
But such a laughter shook the mighty hall
No one could hear me say :
Had she been seen upon the Hill that day ?
And no one knew at all
How long I stood or when at last I sighed and went away.

There is a garden lying in a lull
Between the mountains and the mountainous sea,
I know not where, but which a dream diurnal
Paints on my lids a moment till the hull

Be lifted from the kernel
And Slumber fed to me.
Your foot-print is not there, Mnemosene,
Though it would seem a ruined place and after
Your lichenous heart, being full
Of broken columns, caryatides
Thrown to the earth and fallen forward on their jointless knees,
And urns funereal altered into dust
Minuter than the ashes of the dead,
And Psyche's lamp out of the earth up-thrust,
Dripping itself in marble wax on what was once the bed
Of Love, and his young body asleep, but now is dust instead.

There twists the bitter-sweet, the white wisteria
Fastens its fingers in the strangling wall,
And the wide crannies quicken with bright weeds ;
There dumbly like a worm all day the still white orchid feeds ;
But never an echo of your daughters' laughter
Is there, nor any sign of you at all
Swells fungous from the rotten bough, grey mother of Pieria !

Only her shadow once upon a ſtone
I saw,—and, lo, the shadow and the garden, too,
were gone.

I tell you you have done her body an ill,
You chatterers, you noisy crew !
She is not anywhere !
I sought her in deep Hell ;
And through the world as well ;
I thought of Heaven and I sought her there ;
Above nor underground
Is Silence to be found,
That was the very warp and woof of you,
Lovely before your songs began and after they were
through !
Oh, say if on this hill
Somewhere your ſiſter's body lies in death,
So I may follow there, and make a wreath
Of my locked hands, that on her quiet breaſt
Shall lie till age has withered them !

(Ah, sweetly from the reſt
I see
Turn and consider me
Compassionate Euterpe !)
" There is a gate beyond the gate of Death,
Beyond the gate of everlaſting Life,

Beyond the gates of Heaven and Hell," she saith,
" Whereon but to believe is horror !
Whereon to meditate engendereth
Even in deathless spirits such as I
A tumult in the breath,
A chilling of the inexhaustible blood
Even in my veins that never will be dry,
And in the austere, divine monotony
That is my being, the madness of an unaccustomed
mood.

This is her province whom you lack and seek ;
And seek her not elsewhere.
Hell is a thoroughfare
For pilgrims,—Herakles,
And he that loved Euridice too well,
Have walked therein ; and many more than these ;
And witnessed the desire and the despair
Of souls that passed reluctantly and sicken for the
air ;
You, too, have entered Hell,
And issued thence ; but thence whereof I speak
None has returned ;—for thither fury brings
Only the driven ghosts of them that flee before all
things.
Oblivion is the name of this abode : and she is
there."

Oh, radiant Song ! Oh, gracious Memory !
Be long upon this height
I shall not climb again !
I know the way you mean,—the little night,
And the long empty day,—never to see
Again the angry light,
Or hear the hungry noises cry my brain !

Ah, but she,
Your other sister and my other soul,
She shall again be mine ;
And I shall drink her from a silver bowl,
A chilly thin green wine,
Not bitter to the taste,
Not sweet,
Not of your press, oh, restless, clamorous nine,—
To foam beneath the frantic hoofs of mirth—
But savouring faintly of the acid earth,
And trod by pensive feet
From perfect clusters ripened without haste
Out of the urgent heat
In some clear glimmering vaulted twilight under the odorous vine.

Lift up your lyres ! Sing on !
But as for me, I seek your sister whither she is gone.

Memorial to D. C.

[VASSAR COLLEGE, 1918]

Oh, loveliest throat of all sweet throats,
Where now no more the music is,
With hands that wrote you little notes
I write you little elegies!

I

Epitaph

HEAP not on this mound
  Roses that she loved so well ;
Why bewilder her with roses,
  That she cannot see or smell ?
She is happy where she lies
With the dust upon her eyes.

II

Prayer to Persephone

Be to her, Persephone,
All the things I might not be ;
Take her head upon your knee.
She that was so proud and wild,
Flippant, arrogant and free,
She that had no need of me,
Is a little lonely child
Lost in Hell,—Persephone,
Take her head upon your knee ;
Say to her, " My dear, my dear,
It is not so dreadful here."

III

Chorus

Give away her gowns,
Give away her shoes ;
She has no more use
For her fragrant gowns ;
Take them all down,
Blue, green, blue,
Lilac, pink, blue,
From their padded hangers ;
She will dance no more
In her narrow shoes ;
Sweep her narrow shoes
From the closet floor.

IV

Elegy

Let them bury your big eyes
In the secret earth securely,
Your thin fingers, and your fair,
Soft, indefinite-coloured hair,—
All of these in some way, surely,
From the secret earth shall rise ;
Not for these I sit and stare,
Broken and bereft completely ;
Your young flesh that sat so neatly
On your little bones will sweetly
Blossom in the air.

But your voice,—never the rushing
Of a river underground,
Not the rising of the wind
In the trees before the rain,
Not the woodcock's watery call,
Not the note the white-throat utters,
Not the feet of children pushing
Yellow leaves along the gutters
In the blue and bitter fall,
Shall content my musing mind
For the beauty of that sound

That in no new way at all
Ever will be heard again.
Sweetly through the sappy ſtalk
Of the vigorous weed,
Holding all it held before,
Cherished by the faithful sun,
On and on eternally
Shall your altered fluid run,
Bud and bloom and go to seed ;
But your singing days are done ;
But the music of your talk
Never shall the chemiſtry
Of the secret earth reſtore.
All your lovely words are spoken.
Once the ivory box is broken,
Beats the golden bird no more.

V

Dirge

Boys and girls that held her dear,
  Do your weeping now ;
All you loved of her lies here.

Brought to earth the arrogant brow,
  And the withering tongue
Chastened ; do your weeping now.

Sing whatever songs are sung,
  Wind whatever wreath,
For a playmate perished young,

For a spirit spent in death.
Boys and girls that held her dear,
All you loved of her lies here.

Sonnets

I

We talk of taxes, and I call you friend ;
Well, such you are,—but well enough we know
How thick about us root, how rankly grow
Those subtle weeds no man has need to tend,
That flourish through neglect, and soon must send
Perfume too sweet upon us and overthrow
Our steady senses ; how such matters go
We are aware, and how such matters end
Yet shall be told no meagre passion here ;
With lovers such as we for evermore
Isolde drinks the draught, and Guinevere
Receives the Table's ruin through her door,
Francesca, with the loud surf at her ear,
Lets fall the coloured book upon the floor.

II

Into the golden vessel of great song
Let us pour all our passion ; breast to breast
Let other lovers lie, in love and rest ;
Not we,—articulate, so, but with the tongue
Of all the world : the churning blood, the long
Shuddering quiet, the desperate hot palms pressed
Sharply together upon the escaping guest,
The common soul, unguarded, and grown strong.
Longing alone is singer to the lute ;
Let still on nettles in the open sigh
The minstrel, that in slumber is as mute
As any man, and love be far and high,
That else forsakes the topmost branch, a fruit
Found on the ground by every passer-by.

III

Not with libations, but with shouts and laughter
We drenched the altars of Love's sacred grove,
Shaking to earth green fruits, impatient after
The launching of the coloured moths of Love.
Love's proper myrtle and his mother's zone
We bound about our irreligious brows,
And fettered him with garlands of our own,
And spread a banquet in his frugal house.
Not yet the god has spoken ; but I fear
Though we should break our bodies in his flame,
And pour our blood upon his altar, here
Henceforward is a grove without a name,
A pasture to the shaggy goats of Pan,
Whence flee forever a woman and a man.

IV

ONLY until this cigarette is ended,
A little moment at the end of all,
While on the floor the quiet ashes fall,
And in the firelight to a lance extended,
Bizarrely with the jazzing music blended,
The broken shadow dances on the wall,
I will permit my memory to recall
The vision of you, by all my dreams attended.
And then adieu,—farewell !—the dream is done.
Yours is a face of which I can forget
The colour and the features, every one,
The words not ever, and the smiles not yet ;
But in your day this moment is the sun
Upon a hill, after the sun has set.

V

Once more into my arid days like dew,
Like wind from an oasis, or the sound
Of cold sweet water bubbling underground,
A treacherous messenger, the thought of you
Comes to destroy me ; once more I renew
Firm faith in your abundance, whom I found
Long since to be but just one other mound
Of sand, whereon no green thing ever grew.
And once again, and wiser in no wise,
I chase your coloured phantom on the air,
And sob and curse and fall and weep and rise
And stumble pitifully on to where,
Miserable and lost, with stinging eyes,
Once more I clasp,—and there is nothing there.

VI

No rose that in a garden ever grew,
In Homer's or in Omar's or in mine,
Though buried under centuries of fine
Dead dust of roses, shut from sun and dew
Forever, and forever lost from view,
But must again in fragrance rich as wine
The grey aisles of the air incarnadine
When the old summers surge into a new.
Thus when I swear, " I love with all my heart,"
'Tis with the heart of Lilith that I swear,
'Tis with the love of Lesbia and Lucrece ;
And thus as well my love must lose some part
Of what it is, had Helen been less fair,
Or perished young, or stayed at home in Greece.

VII

When I too long have looked upon your face,
Wherein for me a brightness unobscured
Save by the mists of brightness has its place,
And terrible beauty not to be endured,
I turn away reluctant from your light,
And stand irresolute, a mind undone,
A silly, dazzled thing deprived of sight
From having looked too long upon the sun.
Then is my daily life a narrow room
In which a little while, uncertainly,
Surrounded by impenetrable gloom,
Among familiar things grown strange to me
Making my way, I pause, and feel, and hark,
Till I become accustomed to the dark.

VIII

And you as well must die, beloved dust,
And all your beauty stand you in no stead ;
This flawless, vital hand, this perfect head,
This body of flame and steel, before the gust
Of Death, or under his autumnal frost,
Shall be as any leaf, be no less dead
Than the first leaf that fell,—this wonder fled,
Altered, estranged, disintegrated, lost.
Nor shall my love avail you in your hour.
In spite of all my love, you will arise
Upon that day and wander down the air
Obscurely as the unattended flower,
It mattering not how beautiful you were,
Or how beloved above all else that dies.

IX

Let you not say of me when I am old,
In pretty worship of my withered hands
Forgetting who I am, and how the sands
Of such a life as mine run red and gold
Even to the ultimate sifting duſt, " Behold,
Here walketh passionless age ! "—for there expands
A curious superſtition in these lands,
And by its leave some weightless tales are told.
In me no lenten wicks watch out the night ;
I am the booth where Folly holds her fair ;
Impious no less in ruin than in ſtrength,
When I lie crumbled to the earth at length,
Let you not say, " Upon this reverend site
The righteous groaned and beat their breaſts in prayer."

x

Oh, my beloved, have you thought of this :
How in the years to come unscrupulous Time,
More cruel than Death, will tear you from my kiss,
And make you old, and leave me in my prime ?
How you and I, who scale together yet
A little while the sweet, immortal height
No pilgrim may remember or forget,
As sure as the world turns, some granite night
Shall lie awake and know the gracious flame
Gone out forever on the mutual stone ;
And call to mind how on the day you came
I was a child, and you a hero grown ?—
And the night pass, and the strange morning break
Upon our anguish for each other's sake !

XI

As to some lovely temple, tenantless
Long since, that once was sweet with shivering
brass,
Knowing well its altars ruined and the grass
Grown up between the stones, yet from excess
Of grief hard driven, or great loneliness,
The worshipper returns, and those who pass
Marvel him crying on a name that was,—
So is it now with me in my distress.
Your body was a temple to Delight ;
Cold are its ashes whence the breath is fled,
Yet here one time your spirit was wont to move ;
Here might I hope to find you day or night,
And here I come to look for you, my love,
Even now, foolishly, knowing you are dead.

XII

Cherish you then the hope I shall forget
At length, my lord, Pieria?—put away
For your so passing sake, this mouth of clay,
These mortal bones against my body set,
For all the puny fever and frail sweat
Of human love,—renounce for these, I say,
The Singing Mountain's memory, and betray
The silent lyre that hangs upon me yet?
Ah, but indeed, some day shall you awake,
Rather, from dreams of me, that at your side
So many nights, a lover and a bride,
But stern in my soul's chastity, have lain,
To walk the world forever for my sake,
And in each chamber find me gone again!

Wild Swans

I LOOKED in my heart while the wild swans went
over.
And what did I see I had not seen before?
Only a question less or a question more;
Nothing to match the flight of wild birds flying.
Tiresome heart, forever living and dying,
House without air, I leave you and lock your door.
Wild swans, come over the town, come over
The town again, trailing your legs and crying!

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EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

some press opinions

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